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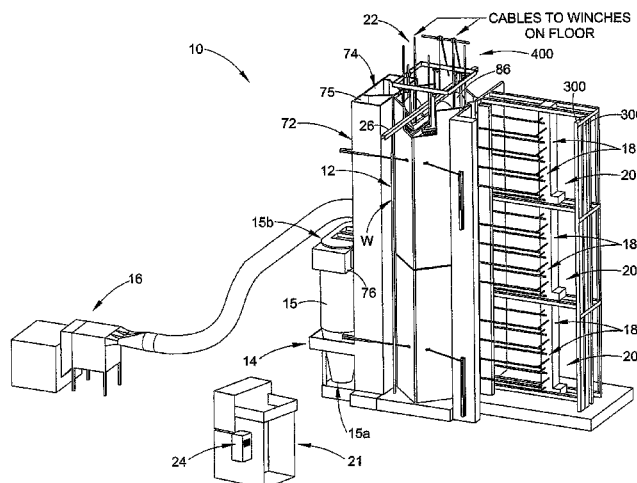
(57) **ABSTRACT**

A powder spray for lengthy parts includes a booth wall structure comprised primarily of doors. A moveable roof may be raised and lowered to clean powder overspray from the interior surfaces of the booth. A cleaning process may be performed with a sideways extraction mode and a downward extraction mode. The mode change occurs when a bulkhead that travels with the moveable roof blocks the inlet duct to the recovery system. The recovery system may be a cyclone system for example. The doors of the booth are hinged so that they can be positioned for spraying operations and cleaning operations. Live hinge designs are provided and hose stress relief designs are also provided. The roof may carry accumulators for pressurized air that feed cleaning nozzles as the roof descends. In addition, exhaust air may be used to assist cleaning the interior surfaces as the roof descends. All of the energy provided for cleaning and color change may be provided by accumulators.

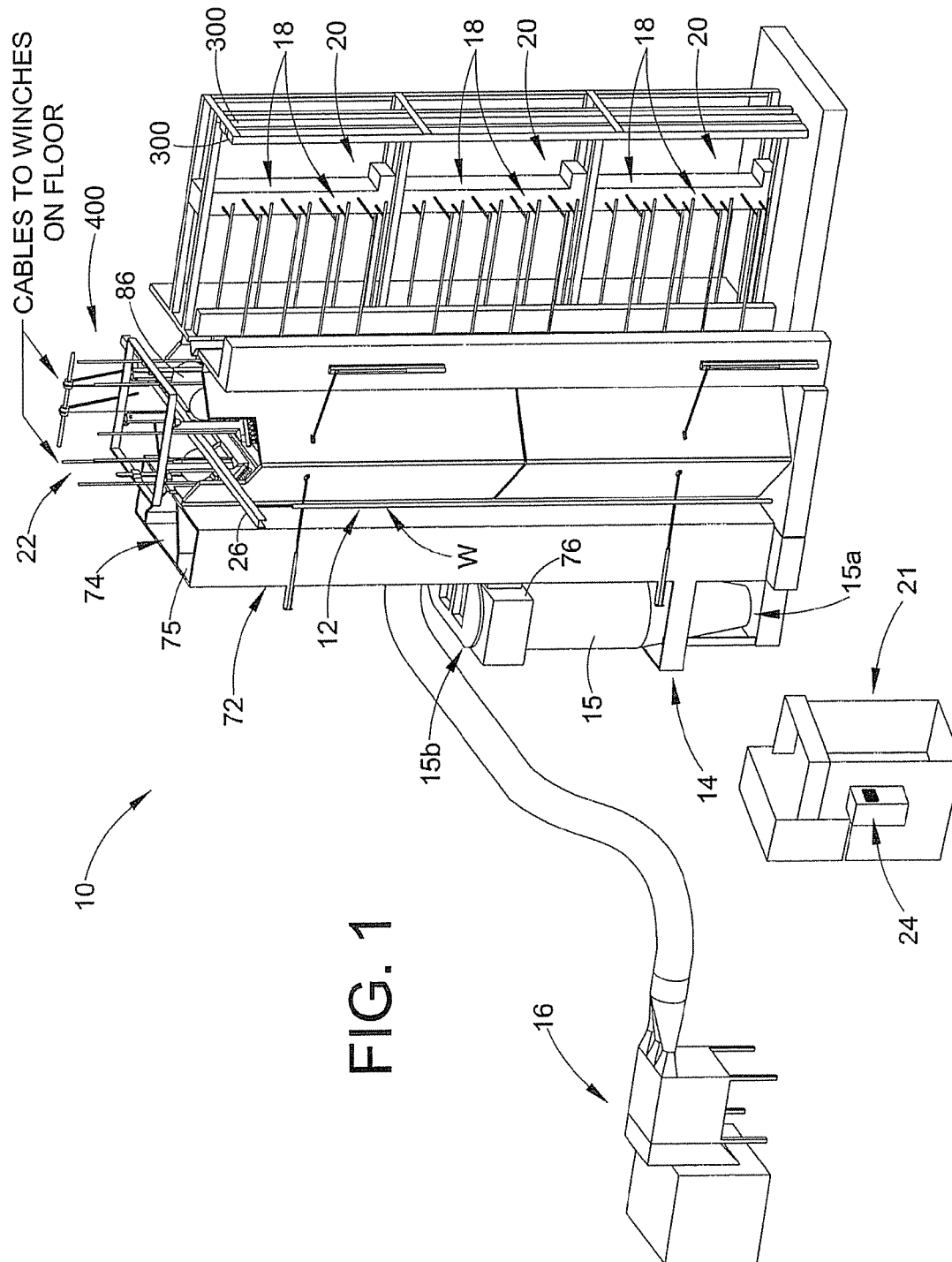
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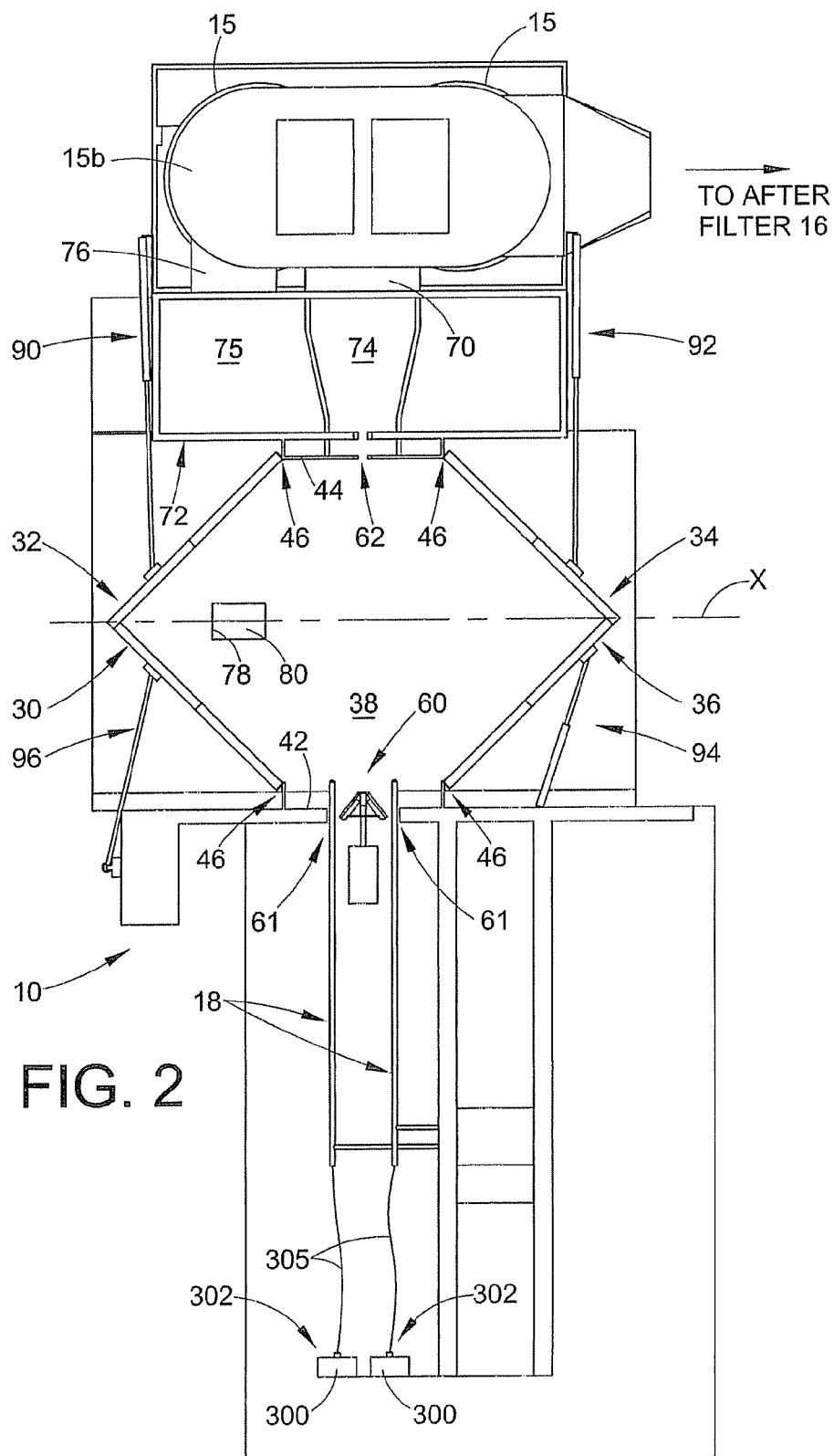
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 (2013.01); **B05B 15/1237** (2013.01);
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 None
 See application file for complete search history.



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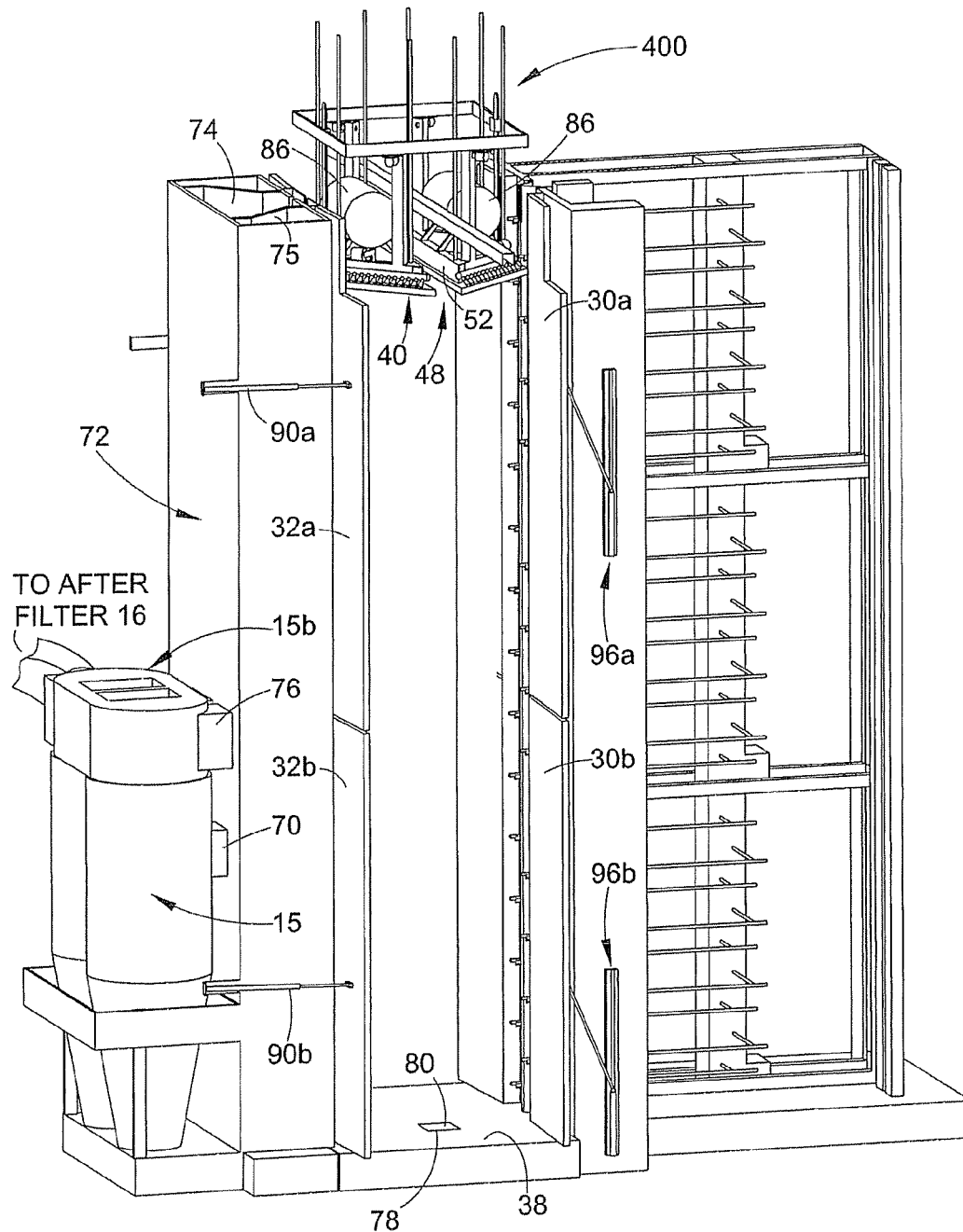


FIG. 2A

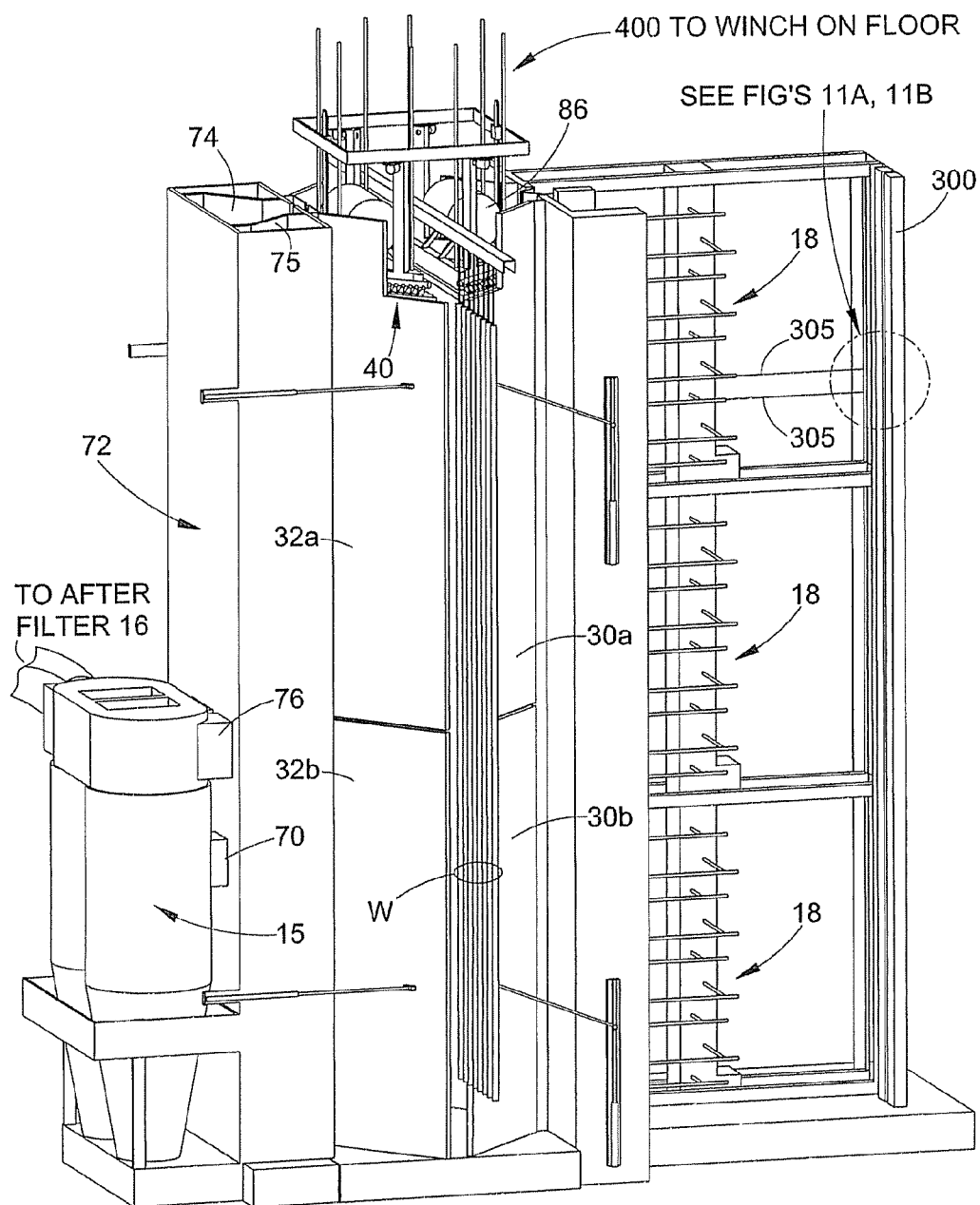


FIG. 2B

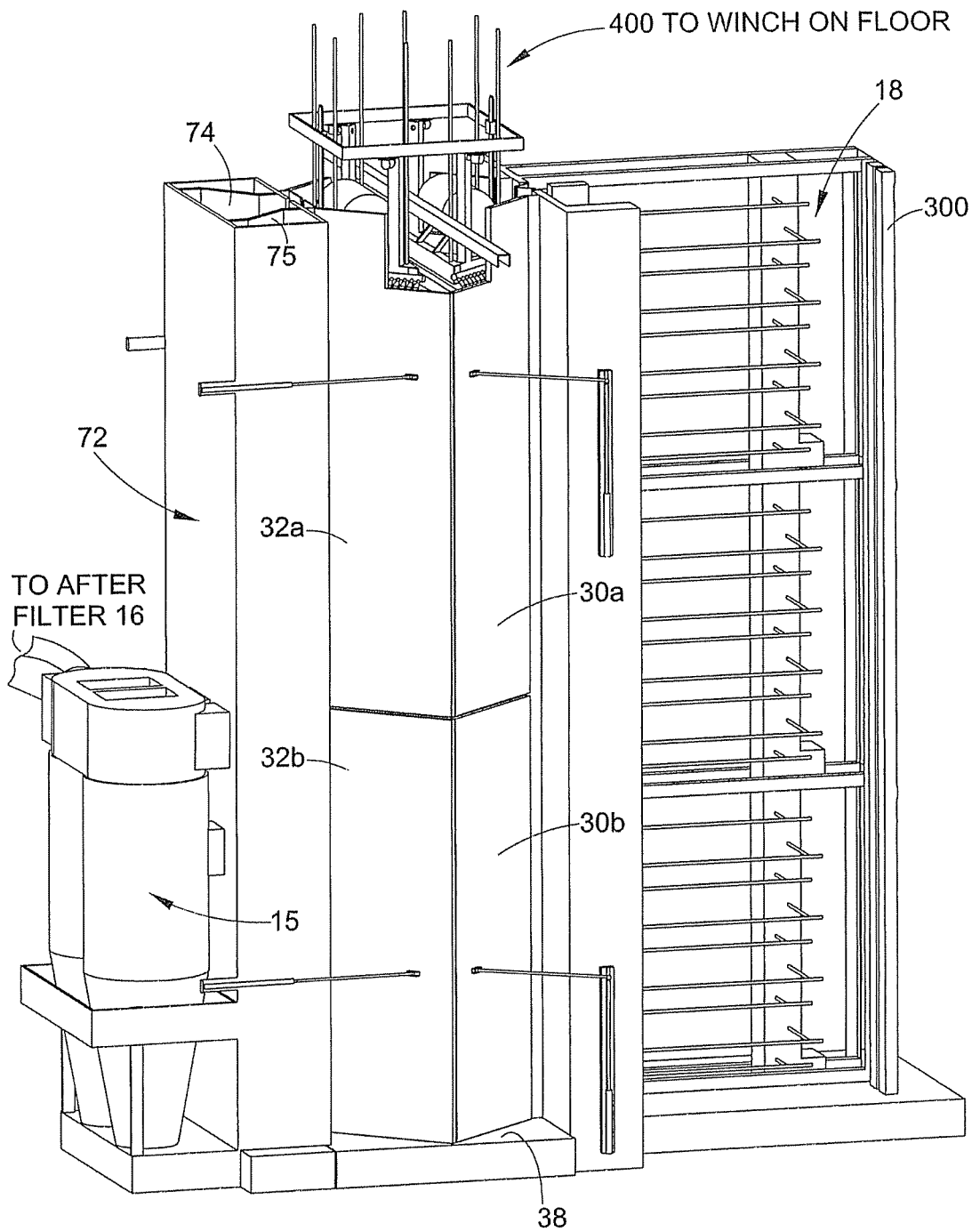
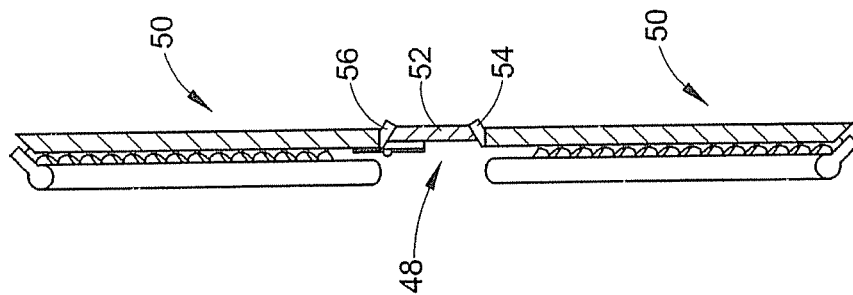
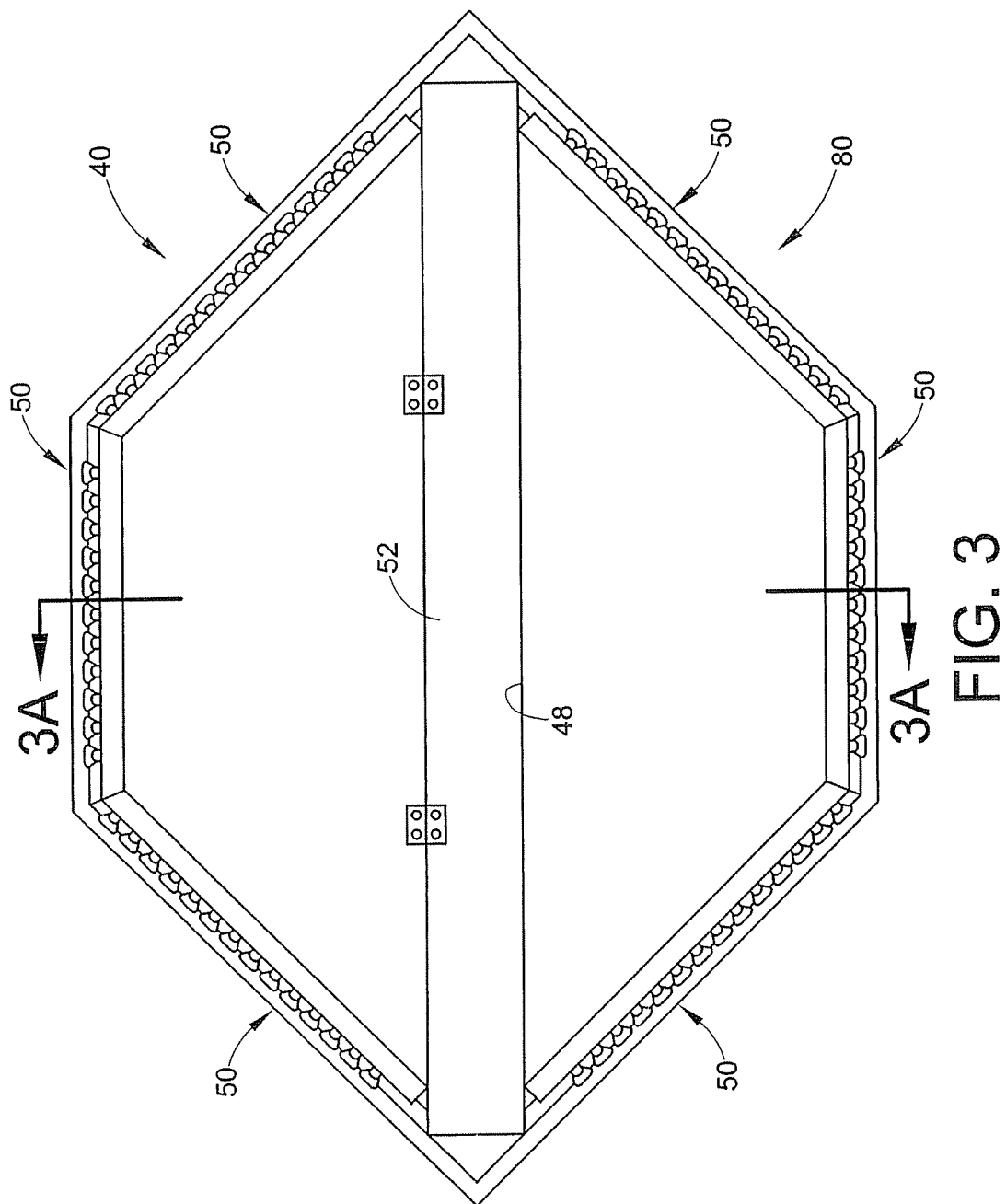


FIG. 2C



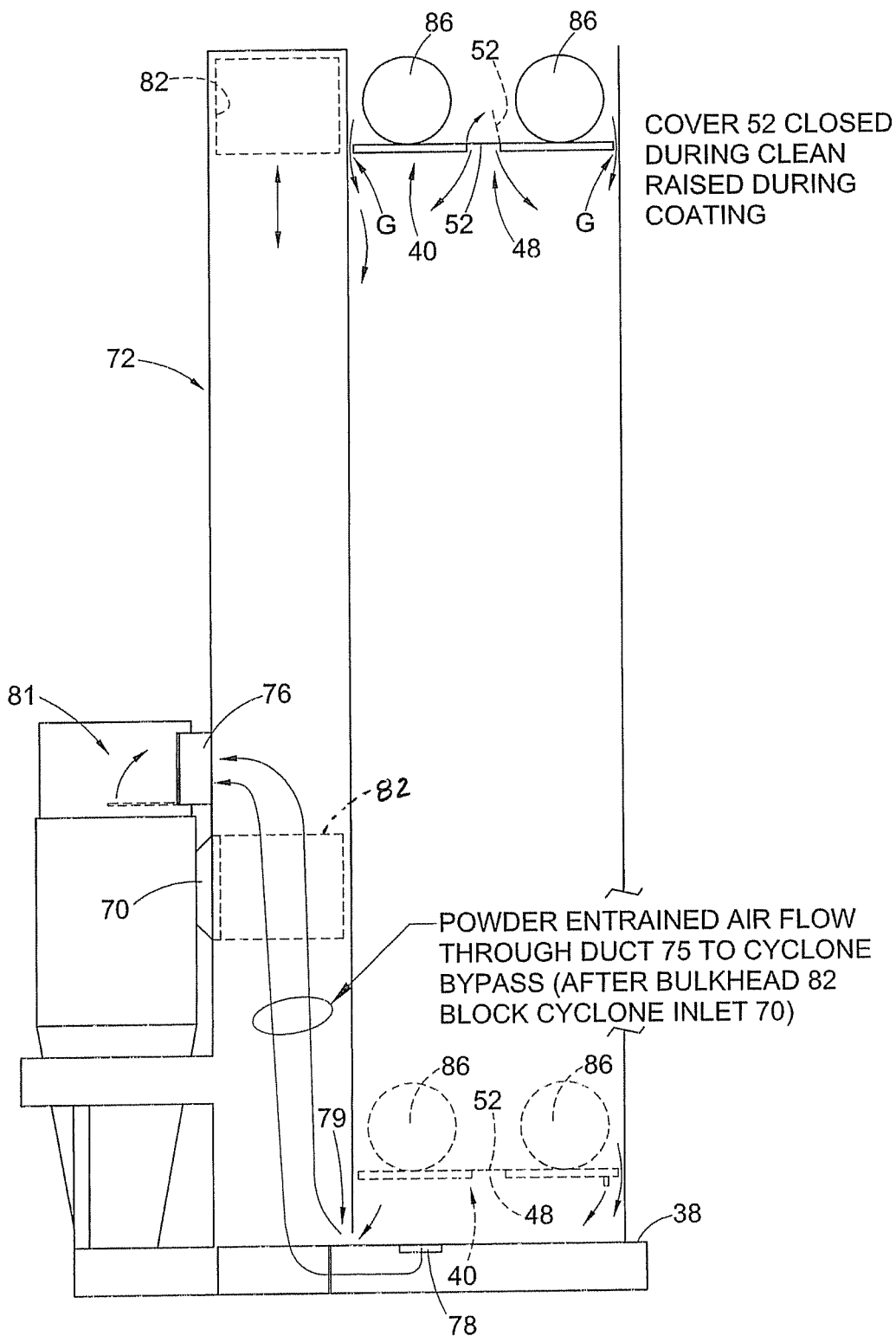


FIG. 4A

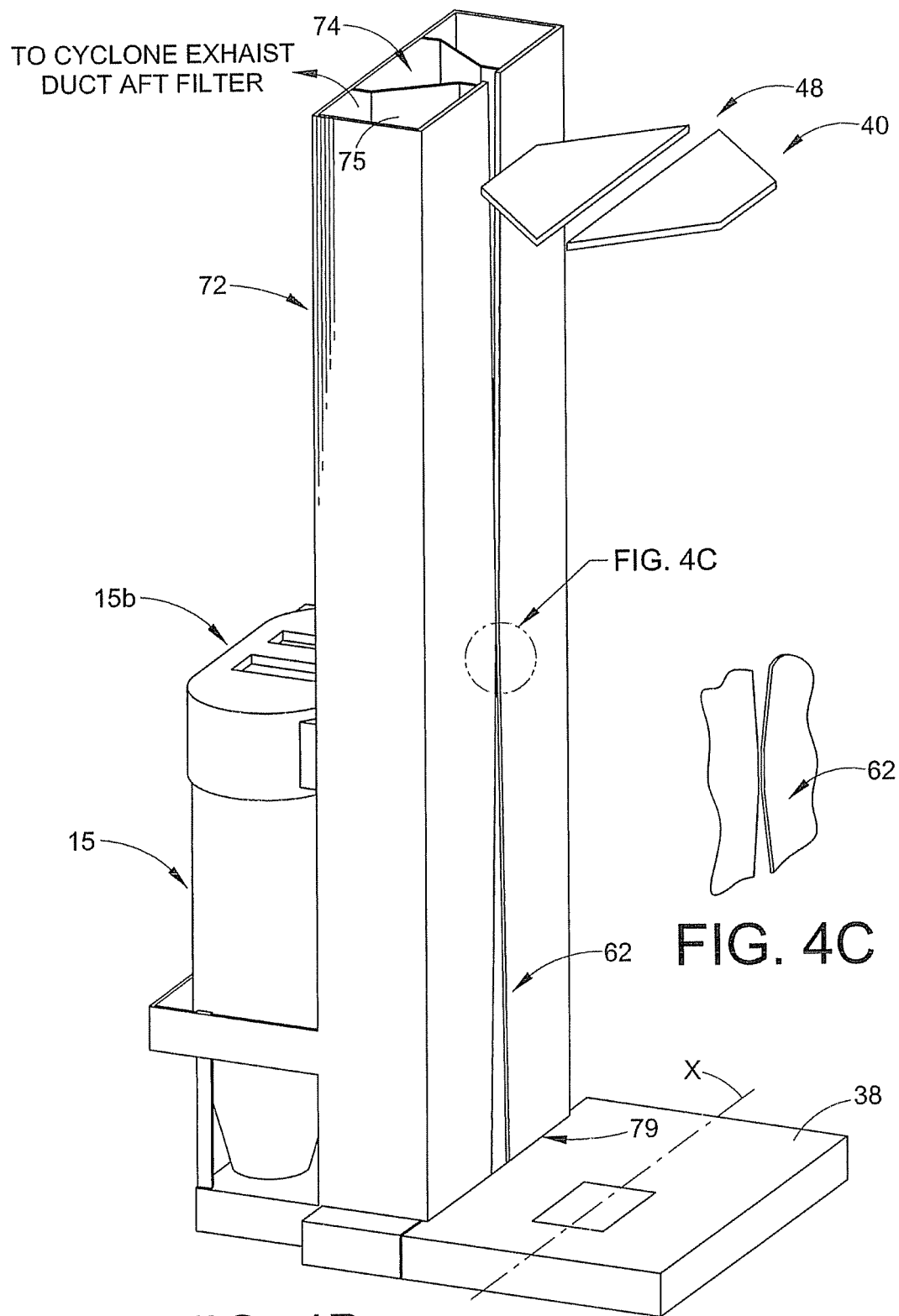
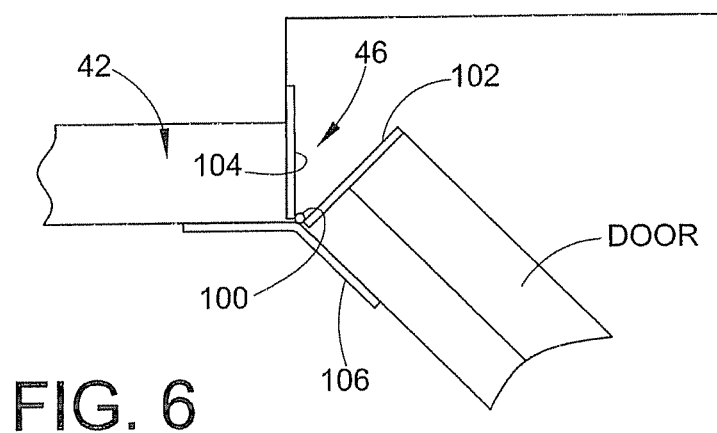
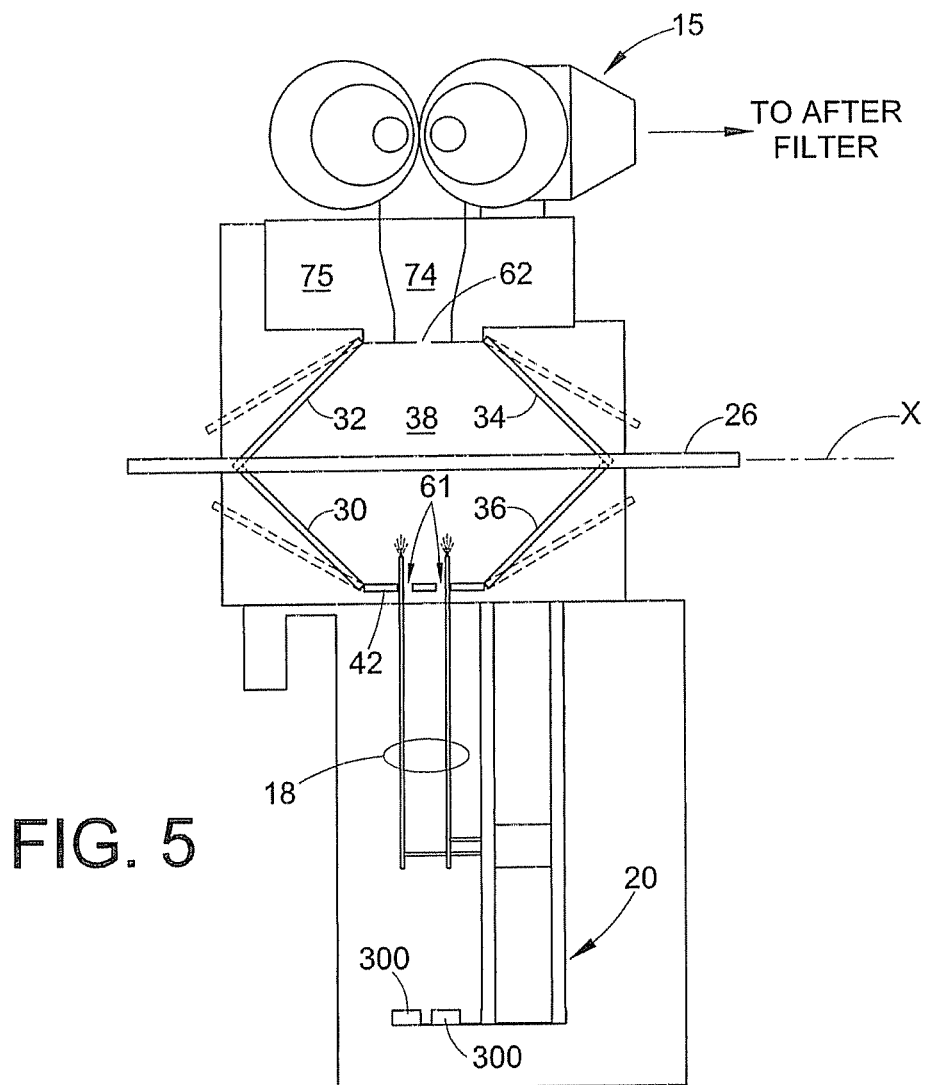
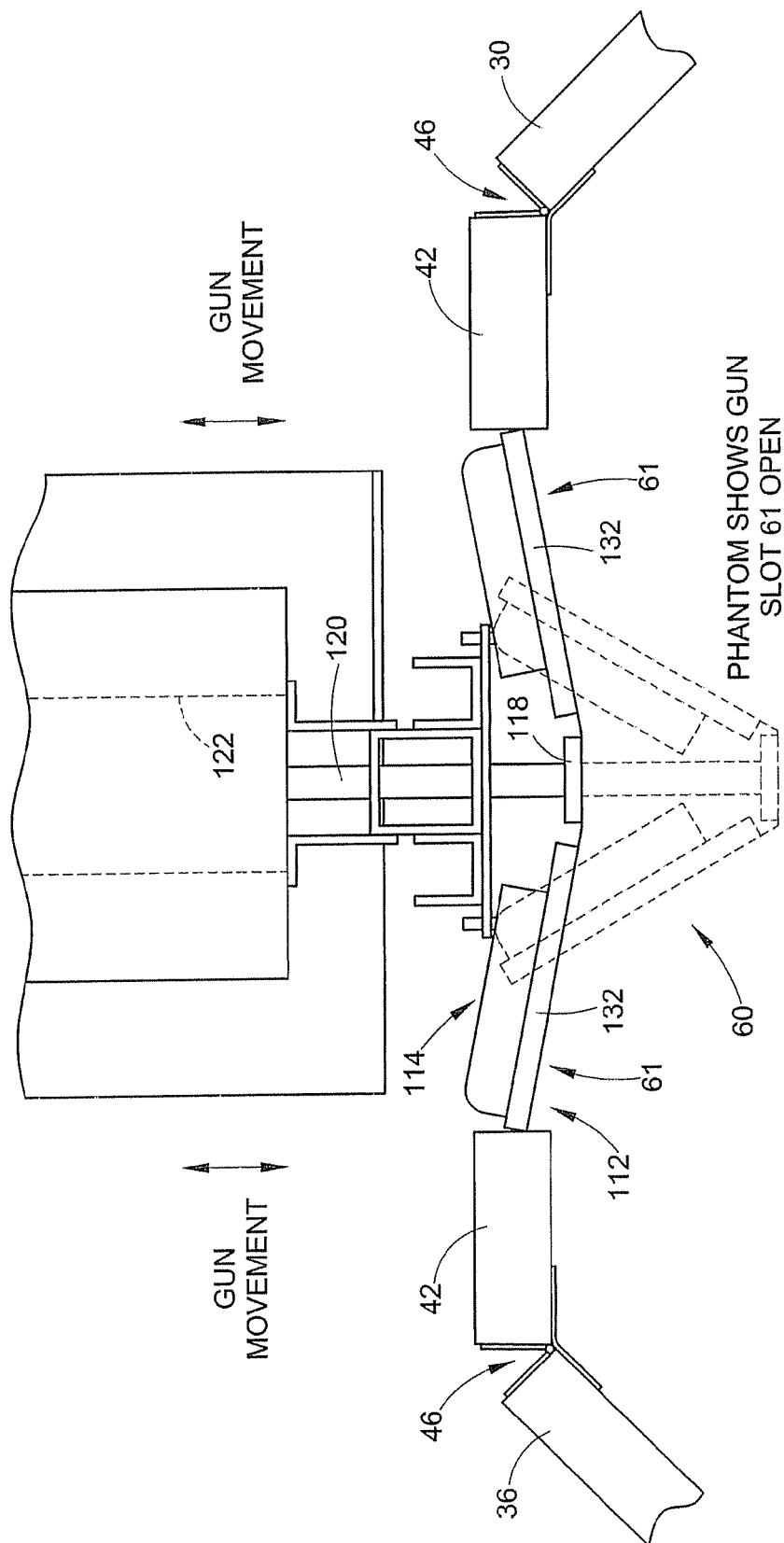


FIG. 4B





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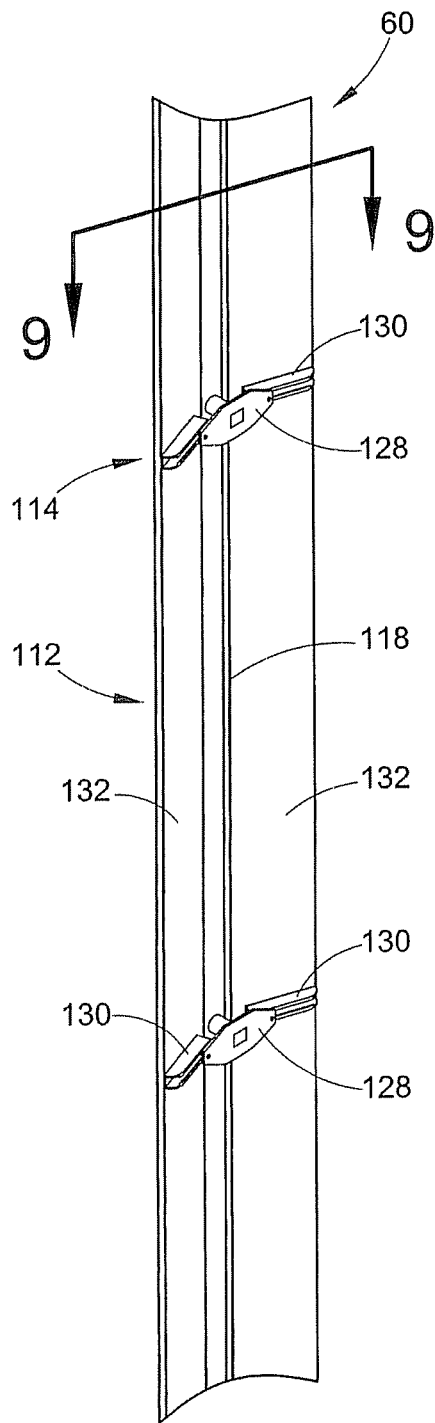


FIG. 8

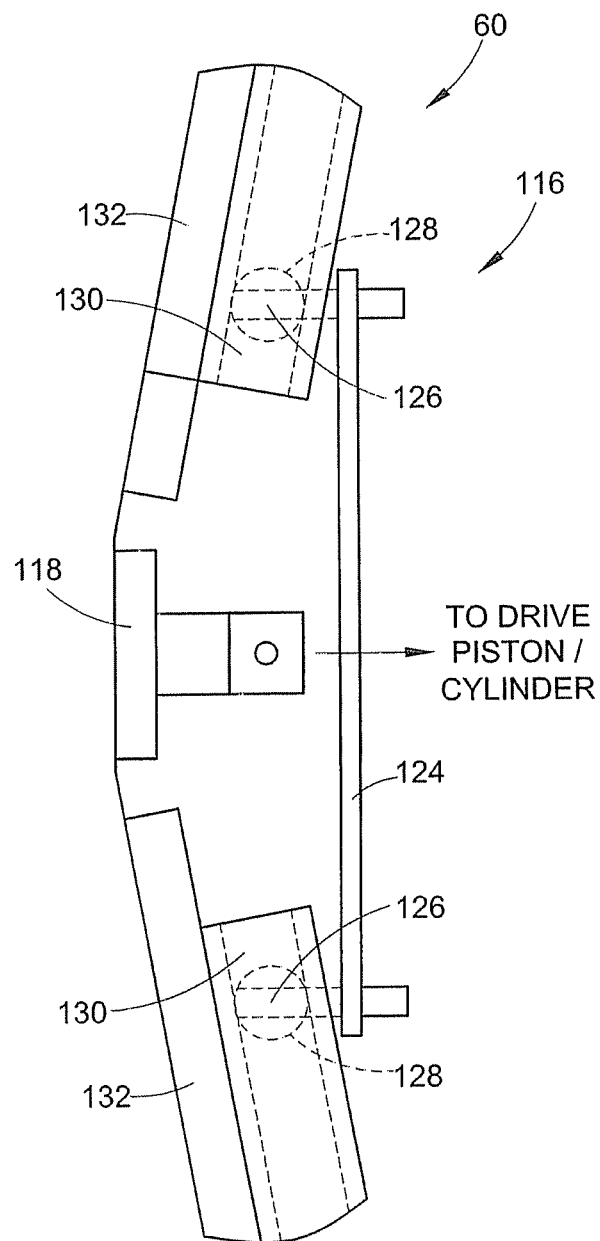


FIG. 9

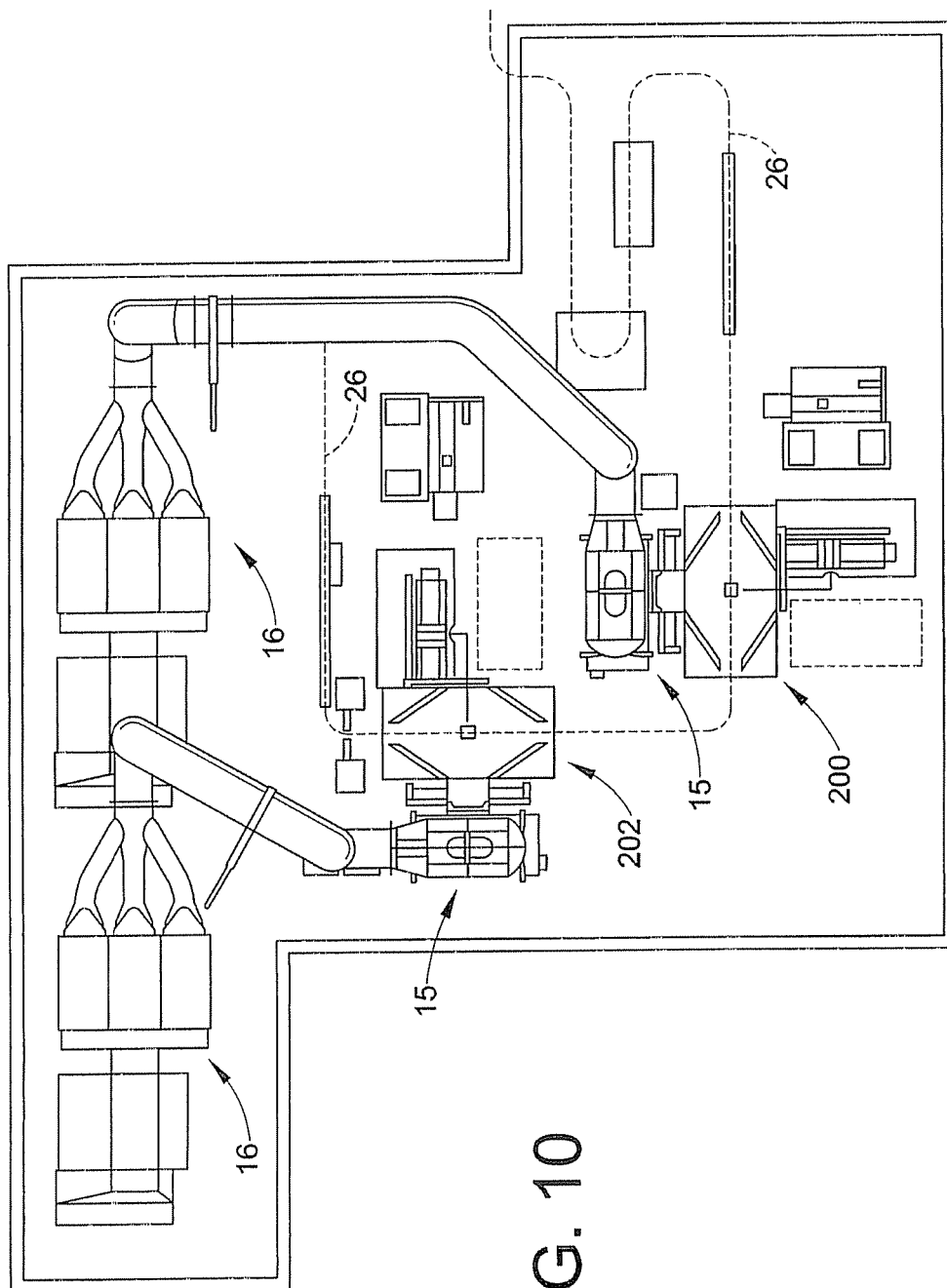
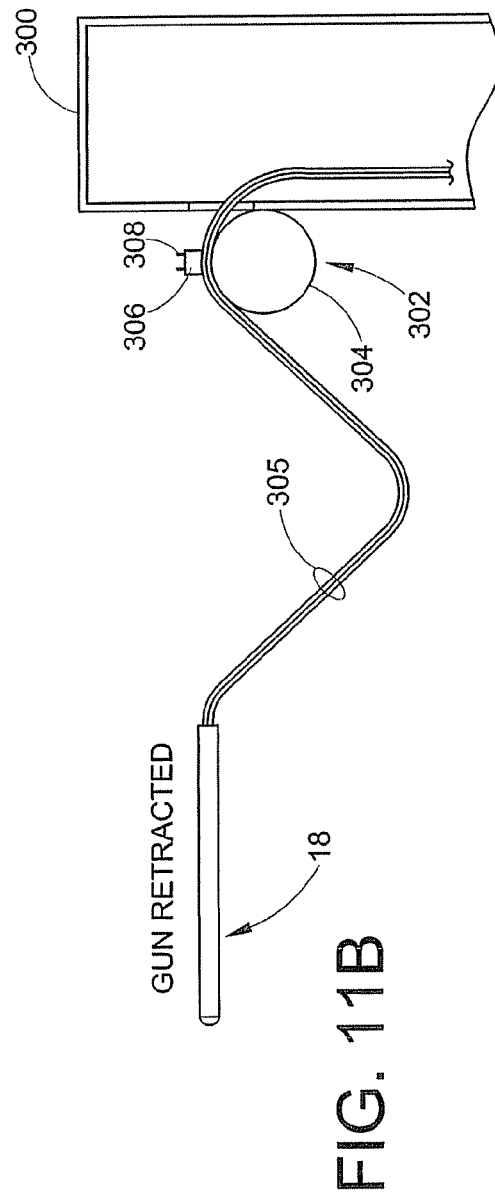
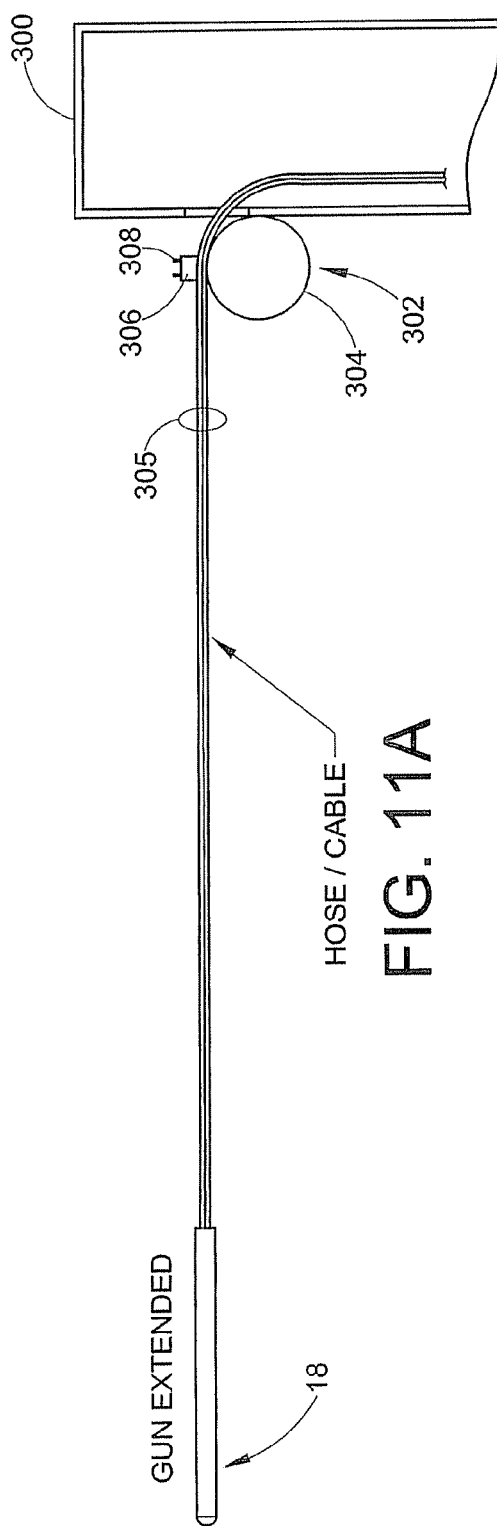
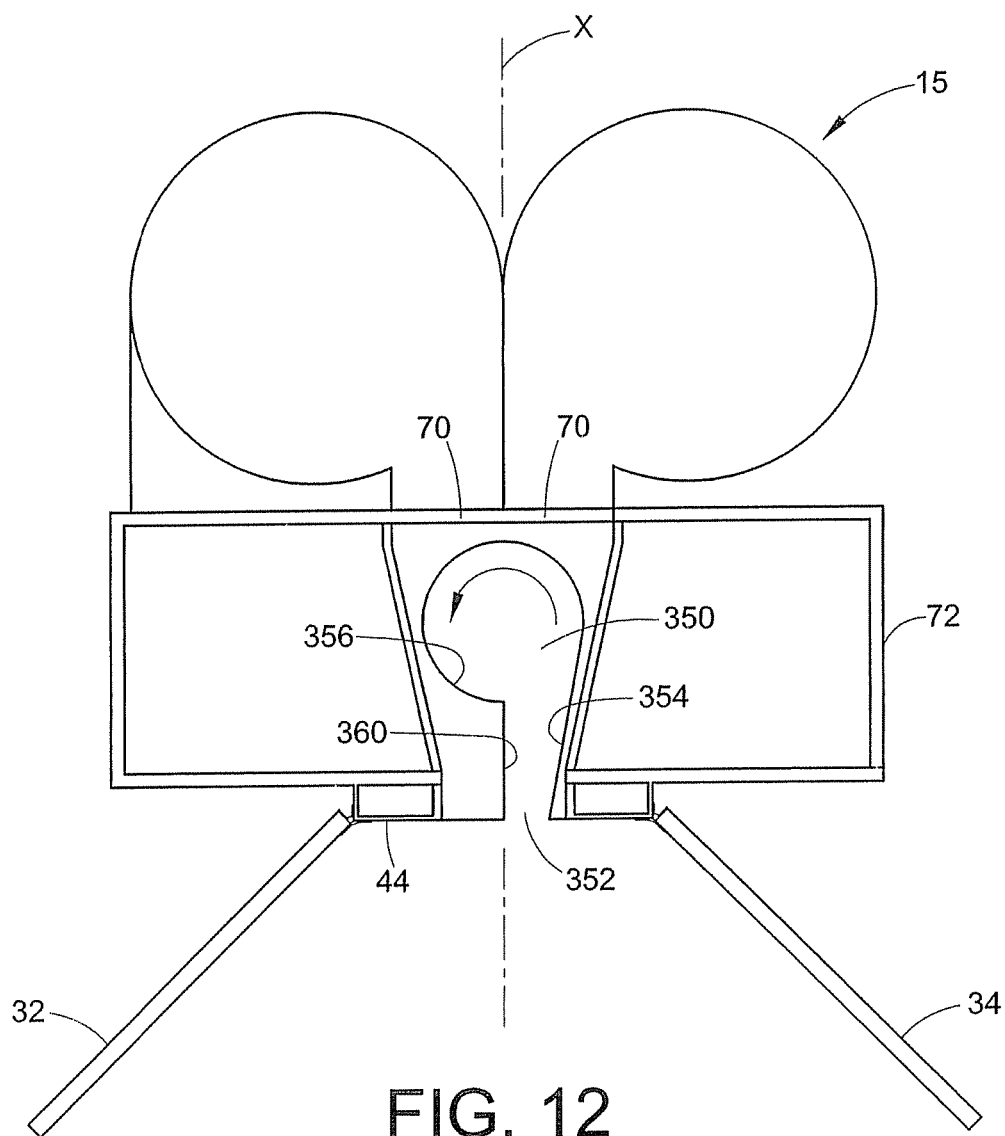


FIG. 10





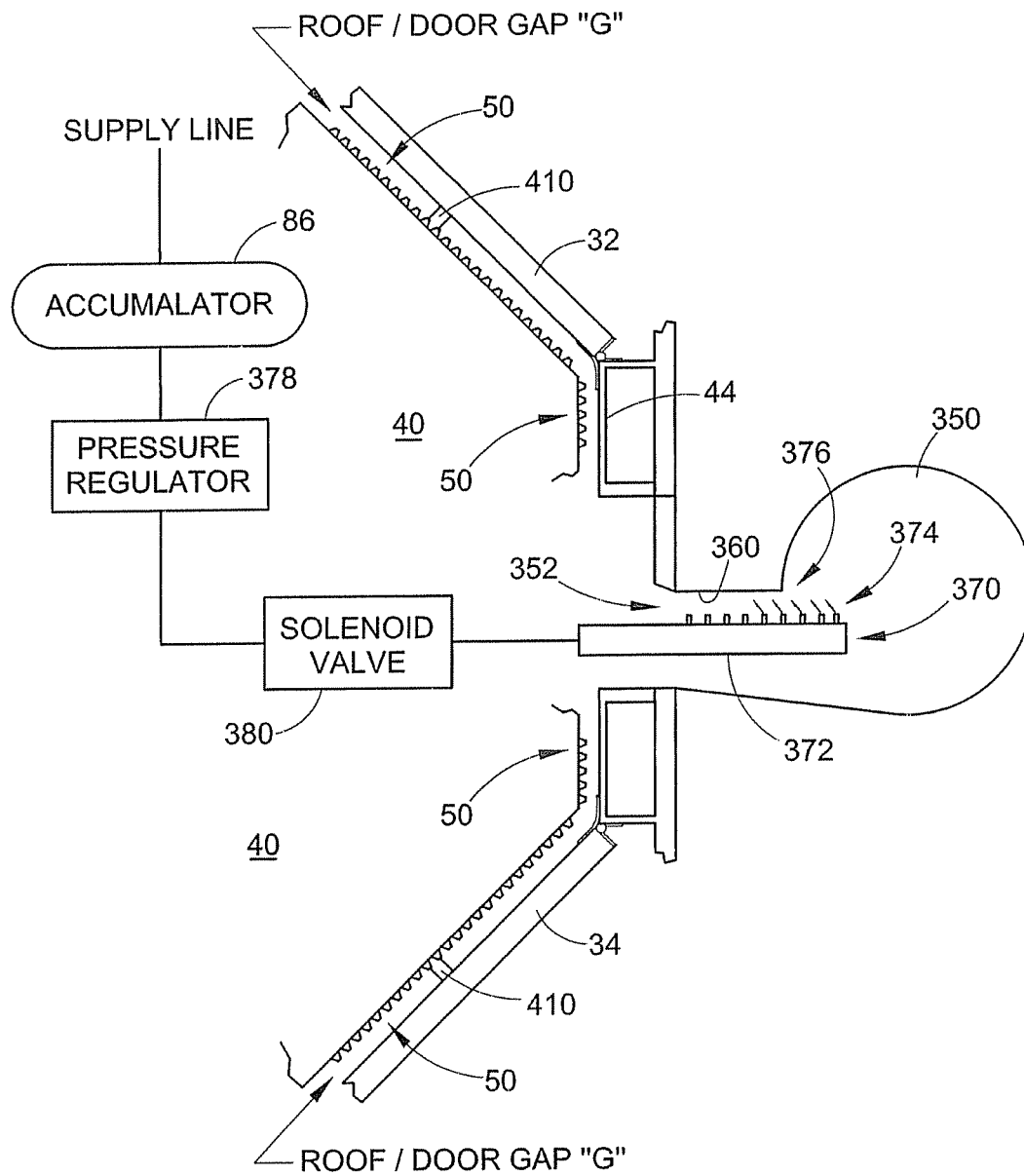


FIG. 13

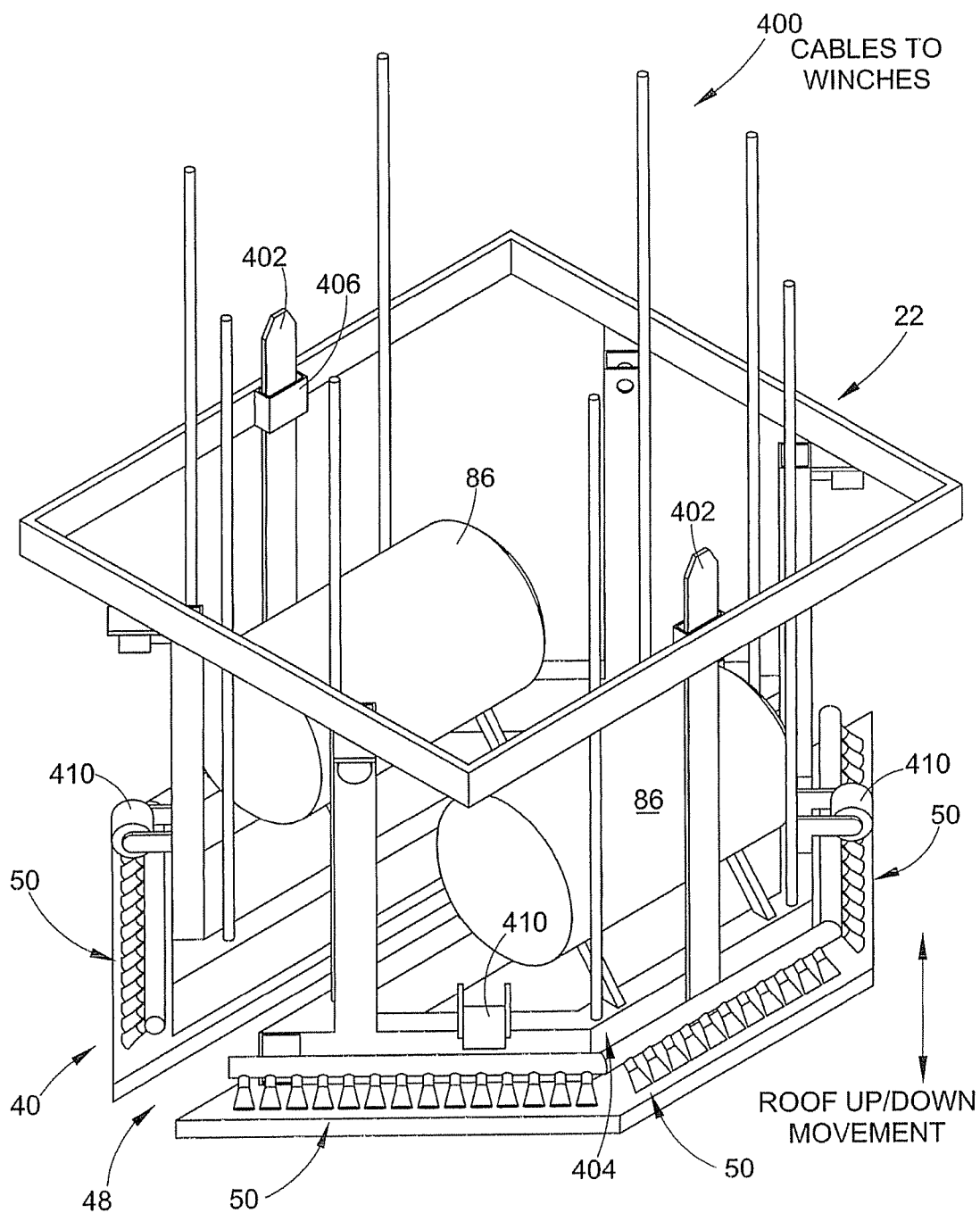


FIG. 14A

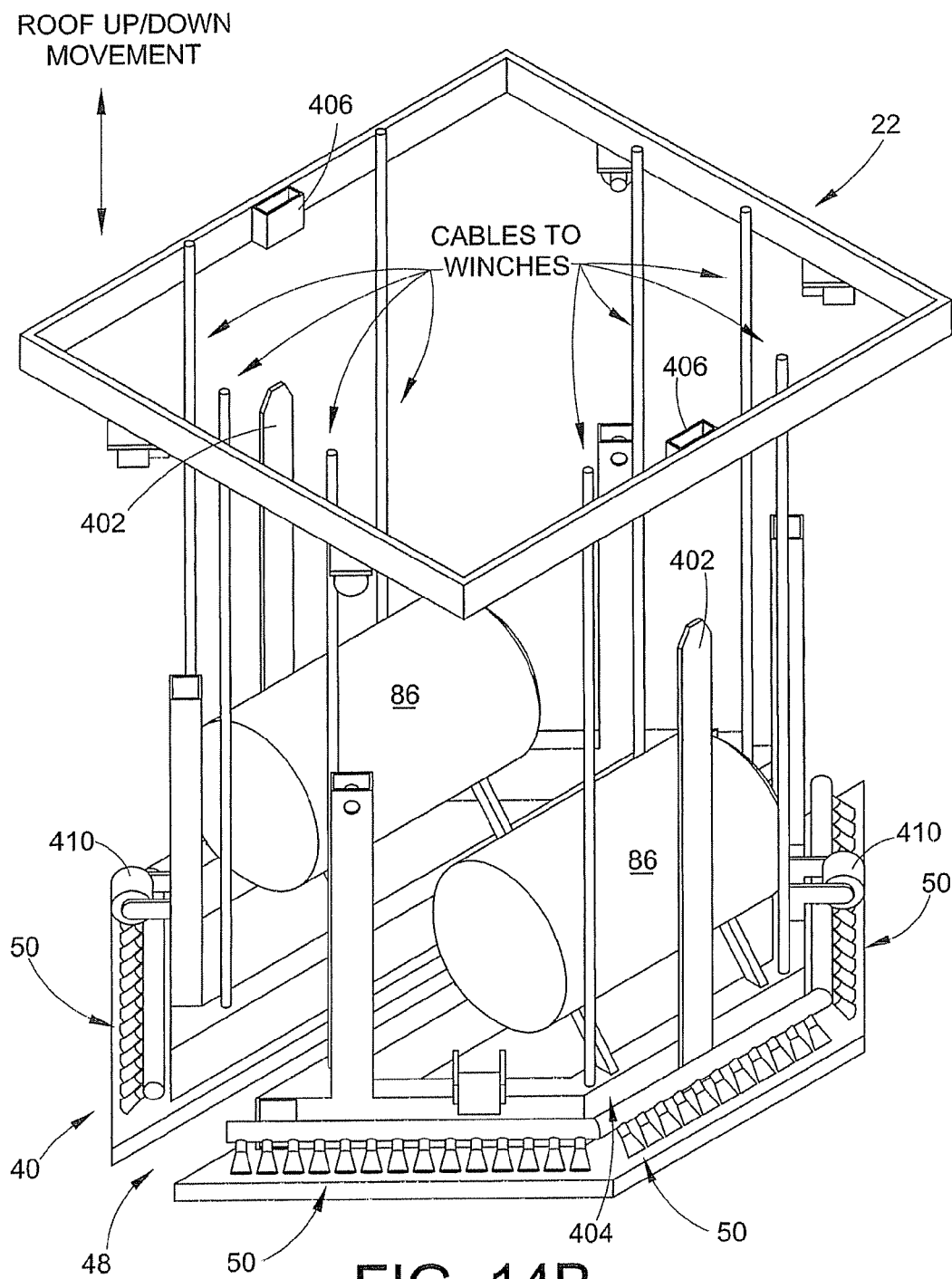


FIG. 14B

POWDER COATING BOOTH**RELATED APPLICATIONS**

This application is a divisional of U.S. Non-Provisional patent application Ser. No. 13/658,350 filed on Oct. 23, 2012, for POWDER COATING BOOTH, which is a divisional of U.S. Non-Provisional patent application Ser. No. 12/688,201 filed on Jan. 15, 2010, for POWDER COATING BOOTH, which is a divisional of U.S. Non-Provisional patent application Ser. No. 11/425,233 filed on Jun. 20, 2006, for POWDER COATING BOOTH, which claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application Ser. No. 60/718,379 filed on Sep. 19, 2005 for POWDER COATING BOOTH, the entire disclosures of which are fully incorporated herein by reference.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The invention relates generally to powder coating booths such as may be used with powder coating material application systems and processes. More particularly, the invention relates to powder coating material application systems, booths and processes for elongated objects, such as for example lengthy extrusions.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Powder coating materials are typically applied to objects or work pieces by spray application apparatus and processes. These spray application apparatus and processes include electrostatic and non-electrostatic processes as are well known. Spray application of powder coating material often is done in a spray booth that is used to contain and recover powder overspray. Powder overspray may be recovered from the booth and either recycled back to the feed center for re-use or otherwise disposed of. One of the more significant aspects of any powder coating system is a powder change operation and the associated system down time and labor involved in such changeovers. For example, when the color of the applied powder needs to be changed, the entire system must be cleaned and purged of the just used color before the next color can be applied. This involves the clean and purge of spray guns, feed hoses and most importantly the spray booth. Long objects such as extrusions that can be up to about twenty-seven feet in length or more present unique challenges for powder application to those objects because a tall spray booth is required for adequate powder overspray containment.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In accordance with one aspect of the invention, a powder spray booth is contemplated that accommodates lengthy parts, objects or work pieces. In one embodiment, a spray booth is provided that has a plurality of doors with one or more of the doors being hinged for movement relative to the other doors, and further wherein the doors substantially comprise the booth wall structure. In a specific embodiment the booth includes four hinged doors and a vertical booth height of greater than twenty feet. In accordance with another aspect of the invention the booth is about three times greater in its vertical dimension than along its lengthwise dimension (wherein lengthwise dimension refers to an axis of travel of parts through the booth during a powder application process.)

In accordance with another aspect of the invention, a powder spray booth is contemplated that incorporates one or more gun slots that may be selectively opened and closed. In one embodiment, a gun slot cover is provided that may be moved

between a gun slot open position that may be used during a powder application process, and a gun slot closed position that may be used during cleaning and powder change operations. In a specific embodiment the gun slot cover may be realized in the form of a pneumatically driven flexible member that bends to open the gun slot and relaxes to cover the gun slot.

In accordance with another aspect of the invention, a powder spray booth is contemplated in which the booth interior surfaces may be cleaned by pressurized air provided from a moveable structural member of the booth. In one embodiment, the spray booth includes a roof or ceiling structure that directs pressurized air against the booth interior surfaces as the roof is lowered from a first or raised position used during a powder application process and a second or lowered position used during cleaning and powder change. In a specific embodiment, the roof carries a plurality of pressurized air devices, such as for example nozzles that direct pressurized air at the booth interior surfaces. Air may be provided to such devices for example by one or more accumulators or air tanks carried on top of the moveable roof. In another embodiment that utilizes hinged doors as the booth wall structure, one or more of the doors may also carry pressurized air devices for removing powder off the booth floor.

In accordance with another aspect of the invention, a powder spray booth is contemplated that includes pressurized air devices for removing powder overspray off the booth interior surfaces. In one embodiment, the cleaning energy used to remove powder from the interior surfaces in the form of pressurized air is sourced from one or more accumulators. In a more specific embodiment, the pressurized air source is intermittently triggered so that blasts of air are directed at the interior surfaces of the spray booth. This produces pressure waves that dislodge powder overspray from the spray booth interior surfaces.

In accordance with another aspect of the invention, a powder spray booth is contemplated that is cleaned by a combination of pressurized air devices and flow of exhaust air into the booth such that the exhaust air assists in removing powder from interior surfaces of the spray booth. In one embodiment, a ceiling structure is provided that has a closely spaced relationship to the interior surfaces of the spray booth. A gap is provided between the ceiling structure and the interior surfaces so that exhaust air is pulled into the spray booth through the gap and applies a shearing force against powder particles on the interior surfaces to dislodge them. The ceiling structure may also carry pressurized air devices that direct high volume pressurized air in the form of pressure waves at the interior surfaces. In a specific embodiment, the ceiling structure may be raised and lowered within the spray booth. The invention further contemplates the cleaning method embodied in such apparatus, in particular a method for cleaning the interior surfaces of a spray booth including the steps of using exhaust air flow into the booth for part of the cleaning energy and intermittently applied pressure waves.

In accordance with another aspect of the invention, a hose strain relief mechanism is provided. The hose strain relief concept has application in any material application system that uses one or more flexible hoses. In the context of a spray booth for elongated parts such as described in the exemplary embodiments herein, the hose strain relief feature is useful due to very long and heavy hose runs particularly to the upper regions of the spray booth.

In accordance with another aspect of the invention, a cleaning arrangement and associated method for a powder spray booth is contemplated that operates in two modes, with one mode being a sideways recovery or extraction mode and the

other being a downward recovery or extraction mode. In one embodiment, a spray booth is provided that includes a roof structure that can be raised and lowered within the booth interior, and the booth further includes a powder recovery system that interfaces with the booth interior through a vertical slot and through a floor duct. With the roof in an upper position, powder overspray is removed from the surfaces and drawn into the vertical slot into the powder recovery apparatus. In one embodiment the recovery apparatus may be a cyclone arrangement. As the roof is lowered, the powder extraction process switches over to powder overspray being extracted through the floor duct. In one embodiment this switch over may be realized by providing a traveling bulkhead within a vertical recovery duct that travels with the roof. When the roof reaches a predetermined position, the bulkhead blocks or isolates the recovery duct from the vertical slot and the floor duct is opened. In another embodiment, a floor slot is used adjacent to the recovery duct.

The invention further contemplates various methods embodied in the use of the described structures and or that can be carried out using such structures as set forth in detail hereinafter.

These and other aspects and advantages of the invention will be readily understood and appreciated from the following detailed description hereinafter and the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a perspective elevation of a powder spray system using several features of the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a plan view of the system of FIG. 1 with the overspray recovery system omitted for clarity;

FIGS. 2A, 2B and 2C illustrate the spray booth of FIG. 1 in various exemplary but not exclusive door positions including a service position, a coating or operational position and a cleaning position respectively;

FIG. 3 is a plan view of a ceiling structure or roof in accordance with the invention and FIG. 3A is a cross-section taken along the line 3A-3A of FIG. 3;

FIGS. 4A and 4B are simplified illustrations of the powder recovery ducts and slots of a booth in accordance with the invention taken in elevation and perspective respectively;

FIG. 4C is an enlarged view of the intake slot portion that is circled in FIG. 4B;

FIG. 5 is a plan illustration of the spray booth of FIG. 1 showing the doors in an open and closed position;

FIG. 6 is a detailed illustration of a live seal for a door of the spray booth of FIG. 1;

FIG. 7 is a detailed plan illustration of a gun slot cover in accordance with the invention;

FIGS. 8 and 9 are a perspective and an enlarged plan illustrations respectively of the gun slot cover and drive mechanism of FIG. 7;

FIG. 10 is a plan layout of a two booth material application system;

FIGS. 11A and 11B illustrate a hose and cable strain relief mechanism with a gun illustrated in an extended and retracted position respectively;

FIG. 12 illustrates an alternative geometry for a recovery duct;

FIG. 13 is a simplified schematic of a duct blow off feature; and

FIGS. 14A and 14B illustrate additional detail of a roof structure for the booth illustrated in FIG. 1 with the roof fully raised and near fully raised respectively.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE EXEMPLARY EMBODIMENTS

FIG. 1 illustrates a powder coating material application system 10 that includes a spray booth 12, a powder overspray recovery system 14, an after filter and blower system 16, a plurality of application devices 18, a gun mount and mover system 20 and an overall structural support framework 22 (only partially illustrated in the various drawings for clarity.) The application devices 18 may be selected from any number of spray gun designs, including a SURE-COAT™ spray gun available from Nordson Corporation, Westlake, Ohio. A feed center 21 may be provided that contains a supply of material that will be applied to objects or work pieces within the spray booth 12. The feed center 21 for example may include any number of hoppers, boxes or other containers of powder, along with suitable pumps and hoses to feed material to the application devices 18. A suitable operator interface 24 to a control system (not shown) may be provided to control operation of the spray guns 18, the powder recovery system 14, the spray booth 12 and the gun mover system 20. The control system and the operator interface 24 may be selected from any number of well known control system concepts as are well known to those skilled in the art, or specifically designed for a particular system. The gun mover system 20 may be used to both extend and retract the spray guns with respect to the spray booth 12 and also may be used to produce an up down oscillatory motion of the guns during a spray operation.

In the exemplary embodiment, the powder overspray recovery system 14 may be realized in the form of a cyclone system 15, however, other recovery system designs may be used. The blower and after filter system 16 provides the energy required for operation of the cyclone recovery system, in the form of a substantial powder entrained exhaust air flow pulled from the spray booth interior to an intake duct of the cyclone 15. The air flow produced by the recovery system also produces a substantial flow of air into and through the spray booth 12, sometimes referred to as containment air. The containment air flow prevents the loss of powder overspray outside the spray booth 12. In the embodiments herein, the cyclone system 15 is a twin cyclone system, however a single cyclone may alternatively be used. In the exemplary embodiment, powder may either be recovered from the cyclone outlet 15a, as is commonly done if the powder will be reused, or alternatively may be extracted from the booth 12 and pass through to the after filter system 16 via a bypass outlet or duct arrangement 15b.

The cyclone 15 has a cyclone inlet 70 (FIGS. 2 and 2A) that communicates with a first or recovery duct or plenum 74 of a vertical primary duct structure (72, see FIG. 2). The cyclone 15 also has a bypass duct inlet 76 that communicates with the bypass outlet duct 15b and also communicates with a second or bypass duct or plenum 75 that is provided in the primary duct 72. Alternatively the bypass duct 75 and the recovery duct 74 may be separate structures. The bypass arrangement may include a bypass door (see below) that opens and closes depending on where the extracted powder is to go. As will be described in greater detail hereinafter, a bulkhead is provided within the recovery duct 74 that under certain conditions blocks the cyclone inlet 70 so that with the bypass door open the extracted powder goes to the after filter 16 via the bypass duct 75 and the bypass outlet 15b, thus bypassing the cyclone 15.

While various concepts, aspects and features of the invention are described and illustrated herein as embodied or used in combination in the exemplary embodiments, these various concepts, aspects and features may also be realized in many

5

alternative embodiments, either individually or in various combinations and sub-combinations thereof. Unless expressly excluded herein all such alternative embodiments, combinations and sub-combinations are intended to be within the scope of the present invention. Still further, while various alternative embodiments as to the various aspects and features of the invention, such as alternative materials, structures, configurations, arrangements, methods, devices, software, hardware, control logic and so on may be described herein, such descriptions are not intended to be a complete or exhaustive list of available alternative embodiments, whether presently known or later developed. Those skilled in the art may readily adopt one or more of the aspects, concepts or features of the invention into additional embodiments within the scope of the present invention even if such embodiments are not expressly disclosed herein. Additionally, even though some features, concepts or aspects of the invention may be described herein as being a preferred arrangement or method, such description is not intended to suggest that such an arrangement or method is required or necessary unless expressly so stated. Still further, exemplary or representative values and ranges may be included to assist in understanding the present invention however, such values and ranges are not to be construed in a limiting sense and are intended to be critical values or ranges only if so expressly stated.

From the approximate scale of FIG. 1 it is noted that the spray booth 12 has a height or vertical dimension that is several times its length. In one example, the spray booth 12 is about twenty-seven feet high and about ten feet in length, wherein by 'length' is meant the distance that work pieces, parts and objects W travel through the spray booth 12 in order to be coated with powder. Thus, the present invention contemplates spray booths that have height to length ratios of at least about two to one and as much as about three to one or greater. This allows the spray booth to be used for powder coating long objects such as extrusions, however, the booth may also be used for spray coating any object that dimensionally can be accommodated through the booth. Due to the height of the booth 12, the structural framework 22 may include platforms (not shown) that can support workers who need to maintain the spray guns 18 and the gun support and mover system 20. An overhead conveyor 26 (partially shown) may be used to transport parts through the booth during a spraying operation.

While there are a number and variety of aspects and concepts to the present invention as set forth in greater detail herein below, two of these concepts should be particularly noted at the outset. The first concept relates to method and apparatus for cleaning the booth interior surfaces. The basic idea is to utilize not only the application of pressurized air to remove powder overspray, but also to utilize energy provided by the substantial air that is drawn into the spray booth by the recovery system. This air flow may be thought of as the containment air, exhaust air or a combination thereof. In accordance with the invention, during a cleaning operation this air flow is drawn through a somewhat narrow gap adjacent the interior surfaces to create a shear force of the air against the surfaces. This force not only removes powder overspray from the surfaces but also imparts significant kinetic energy and momentum to the dislodged particles which in turn may knock other powder particles from the interior surfaces. In conjunction with the use of the substantial air flow into the booth via the noted gap, pressurized air may also be intermittently applied against the interior surfaces in the form of pressure waves. This energy also removes powder overspray from the interior surfaces. In an exemplary embodiment described below, these two cleaning concepts of

6

using exhaust air and pressure waves are used in combination and realized by using a moveable structure such as a roof that carries pressurized air nozzles and that provides the above noted gap adjacent the interior surfaces. The nozzles are intermittently triggered to create the pressure waves, and the source of the pressurized air in the exemplary embodiment may be one or more storage tanks or accumulators that store a volume of pressurized air.

The second concept to be noted is the idea of removing powder overspray from the booth interior initially by a sideways extraction into a vertical slot that extends along the height of the booth, wherein the slot opens to the intake of a recovery system such as a cyclone. A moveable roof may be used to further clean interior surfaces of the spray booth, and as the roof is lowered the powder overspray extraction transitions from a sideways extraction to a downward extraction through a duct or slot at the bottom of the booth. In the exemplary embodiment this transition occurs by blocking or closing the cyclone intake when the roof reaches a predetermined position, and opening a flow passage for powder overspray to be drawn from the booth into a bypass duct of the cyclone and on to the after filter system.

The spray booth 12 may be generally diamond shaped although two apexes of the diamond are somewhat truncated as will be apparent from FIG. 2 which is a plan view of the basic system 10 (the after filter and blower system 16 being omitted for clarity, as well as the roof and some of the frame work 22.)

With reference then to FIG. 2 and FIGS. 2A-2C, the exemplary spray booth 12 includes four doors 30, 32, 34 and 36 that may be hinged or otherwise mounted to the structural framework so as to be easily opened and closed. The spray booth 12 is substantially defined by these four doors, a floor 38 and a moveable roof or ceiling structure 40. The right front door 30 is hinged to one side of a gun slot panel 42 and the left front door 32 is hinged to one side of a recovery duct intake panel 44. The right rear door 36 is hinged to an opposite side of the gun slot panel 42 and the left rear door 34 is hinged to an opposite side of the recovery duct panel 44. The terms front and rear are used as a convenience to refer to the lengthwise ends of the booth that the traveling parts enter and leave respectively it being understood that direction of travel through the booth may be reversed. The terms left and right are also merely a convenience when referring to the drawings. Due to their length, the doors may be multi-piece construction having an upper section and a lower section as best illustrated in FIGS. 1 and 2A-2C. Thus, other than the short (lengthwise) gun slot panel 42 that truncates one apex of the diamond and the short (lengthwise) intake panel 44 that truncates an opposite apex of the diamond, the booth 12 has a vertical wall structure that is defined in large measure by four hinged doors with each door comprising two (upper and lower) sections. This is in distinct contrast to prior booths that typically have a door structure at the booth ends but otherwise have fixed vertical walls that define the booth configuration.

The hinged doors 30, 32, 34 and 36 may each be made of composite materials including a foam core panel and gelcoat inner surface such as sold by Nordson Corporation as an Apogee panel structure. Other door structures may alternatively be used as required. The doors may be removably mounted using lift off hinges 46 as will be further described herein, or other suitable hinge designs as required. The spray booth vertical wall structure is thus primarily defined by the doors.

The roof 40 may also be made of composite panels and has a generally conforming diamond shape perimeter (generally conforming to the plan shape of the booth when the doors are

7

closed) but with a conveyor slot **48** provided (FIG. 2A). The roof **40** includes an upper frame (**404**, FIGS. 14A, 14B) that is supported by a series of cables or other suitable mechanism so that the roof can be raised and lowered in a level manner within the spray booth. The roof **40** is in its uppermost position (FIG. 2A) during a material application or coating operation and can be lowered nearly to the floor (see FIG. 4A) during a cleaning or color change operation. The roof **40** is dimensioned so that the generally conforming perimeter has a narrow lateral clearance or gap with the door surfaces, for example about two inches, when the doors are fully closed (FIG. 13). This narrow clearance helps to contain powder overspray while at the same time providing a source of exhaust air drawn into and through the booth by the powder recovery system **14**. This substantial air flow through the roof/door gaps is also used to clean the door interior surfaces as will be further explained.

FIG. 3 illustrates a plan view of the roof **40** panel structure. The roof **40** carries a series of air nozzles **50** that may extend around the entire periphery of the roof (in FIG. 3 not all of the nozzles are illustrated) or at least at enough intervals and positions to thoroughly clean the interior surfaces of the doors. The roof **40** also includes a conveyor slot cover **52** that preferably is hinged so that it can be raised and lowered either manually or by operation of a suitable actuator. The cover **52** is raised to its upright position for a spraying operation so that the conveyor hangers can pass through the slot **48**. During cleaning and/or color change operations, however, the cover **52** is lowered to its closed position. FIG. 3A further illustrates that the roof may include two air ducts **54** and **56** that extend lengthwise along either side of the conveyor slot **48** and provide an air flow down into the booth so as to prevent powder from escaping through the conveyor slot **48**. As explained below, the ducts **54**, **56** may be coupled to a suitable source of pressurized air.

As noted herein above, the roof **40** may include a frame structure (**404**, see FIG. 14) that may be supported by winch driven cables **400** so that the roof **40** can be raised and lowered during a cleaning operation. Since the roof is basically a two section structure, the closed cover **52** helps to stabilize the roof sections as it travels up and down the booth, especially when the nozzles **50** are intermittently triggered. The roof frame **404** further supports a source or reservoir of compressed air such as air tanks (**86**, FIG. 14A) or accumulators that provide high volume pressurized air to the ducts **54**, **56** and the nozzles **50**. The tanks **86** thus provide an energy/volume storage system to deliver high volume pressurized air when the nozzles **50** are triggered, thus producing a pressure wave of high volume air directed at the interior surfaces of the booth **12**. Supply hoses are connected to the tanks **86** to replenish them during a cleaning operation.

As best illustrated in FIGS. 2A-2C and FIGS. 4A-4B, the latter which are a simplified schematic of the cyclone/booth interface, the cyclone **15** interfaces with the spray booth **12** via the primary duct **72** that extends the height of the booth **12**. The duct **72** is multi-sectional and includes an interior recovery plenum **74** that communicates with a booth intake slot **62** formed in the intake panel **44**. The plenum **74** also communicates with the cyclone inlet **70**. Powder overspray is drawn sideways into the plenum **74** from the spray booth **12** via the slot **62** and passes into the cyclone **15** via the cyclone intake duct **70**. During spray coating operations, the roof **40** is positioned at the top of the booth **12**. The intake slot **62** extends vertically along the entire height of the booth **12**.

As will be further explained herein below, the floor **38** may include a bypass opening **78** that may be selectively opened and closed with a slide cover **80**. During a cleaning operation,

8

as the roof **40** is lowered towards the cyclone inlet region, powder overspray is removed from the interior surfaces of the booth **12** and drawn into the intake slot **62** and into the cyclone for recovery. As the roof **40** is lowered to a point at which the cyclone inlet **70** is blocked by a bulkhead **82** (see FIG. 4A), the bypass opening **78** is opened and communicates with the vertical bypass duct **75** which connects to the bypass inlet **76** above the cyclone **15** (see FIG. 4a) so that the powder entrained exhaust air bypasses the cyclone and is transported to the after filter and blower system **16**. The bulkhead **82** travels vertically within the recovery duct **74** at the same speed as the roof **40** during a cleaning operation. But, when the bulkhead **82** reaches a position in which it faces and blocks off the inlet to the cyclone **15**, positive stops prevent the bulkhead **82** from being lowered further even though the roof **40** continues to descend during a cleaning operation. When the cyclone inlet is blocked by the bulkhead **82**, the bypass opening **78** is opened and powder flows through the opening **80** and into the bypass recovery duct **75** and on to the after filter and blower system **16** via the cyclone bypass duct **15b**.

The doors **30** and **36** that generally extend away from the gun slot panel **42** and toward the recovery intake slot **62** may be provided with air jets (not shown) along their bottom edge so as to direct powder that falls on the floor toward the intake slot **62** of the recovery system. Compressed air tanks or accumulators (not shown) may be disposed below the floor of the booth or other convenient location to supply high volume compressed air to the door air jets. In accordance with an aspect of the invention, all of the energy needed to remove overspray coating material—from the booth interior surfaces via nozzles on the roof, the doors, gun blow off nozzles and so on—may be provided by accumulators so that the energy in the form of high volume pressurized air can be stored and ready to use. The accumulators may be replenished during spray coating operations although the accumulators **86** on the roof **40** are periodically replenished during a cleaning operation as will be further explained below.

The doors **30**, **32**, **34** and **36** are fully closed as in FIG. 2 during a cleaning mode of operation. When the doors are fully closed, the doors closely surround the roof **40** perimeter (for example with about a lateral two inch gap), and the roof conveyor slot cover **52** is closed so that powder overspray can be removed from the interior surfaces of the booth and will be contained and not escape the booth but rather collected into the recovery system. A gun slot cover arrangement **60** (FIG. 2 and the discussion below referencing FIGS. 7-9) is also closed to prevent powder escaping through the gun slots **61**. Prior to and/or after the conveyor slot cover **52** is closed, the roof nozzles **50** may be triggered to remove powder at the top of the booth surfaces.

The roof **40** is lowered and the air nozzles **50** that travel with the roof are used to remove powder off the interior surfaces of the doors. In this exemplary embodiment, the nozzles **50** are intermittently triggered to direct pressure waves along the booth surfaces, for example about a 1.5 second blast of air at about 100 psi. The accumulators **86** are sized to permit them to be mounted on the roof frame and travel with the roof **40**, therefore, the accumulators **86** are not particularly large. For example, the accumulators **86** may be sized at about sixty gallons so that each discharge cycle through the nozzles **50** substantially reduces the stored amount of compressed air energy in the accumulators **86**. In the exemplary embodiment, it takes about eight seconds to replenish the accumulators **86** so that the nozzles **50** are intermittently triggered or cycled at about 1.5 second on and about eight seconds off as the roof is lowered. The descent

rate of the roof is balanced with the replenish rate of the accumulators so that there is no loss of pressure or volume to maintain effective cleaning of the surfaces throughout the descent of the roof 40.

During a cleaning as well as a coating operation, the after filter system 16 is constantly drawing exhaust air into the booth 12 via the cyclone 15. During a cleaning operation, this exhaust air primarily enters the booth 12 via the gap between the roof 40 perimeter and the door interior 30, 32, 34, 36 surfaces throughout the descent of the roof. With reference to FIG. 4A, this high velocity air flow produces a shearing force that dislodges powder particles from the door interior surfaces. This shear force is the only cleaning force applied to the interior surfaces during each eight second interval that the accumulators 86 are being replenished. The nozzles 50 create a pressure wave that is effective for a distance of about two feet with each 1.5 second trigger of high pressure air. Therefore, the rate of descent of the roof 40 during a cleaning operation may be selected to balance the effective use of the nozzles 50 to blast powder from the surfaces and the high velocity exhaust air to also dislodge powder from these surfaces. In one embodiment the roof may descend at about 8-10 feet/minute, and the roof retracted back to the top at about 30 feet/minute.

The size of the gap between the roof and the interior door surfaces may be used to control the air flow and shear force created by the exhaust air. The after filter system 16 can draw a substantial volume of exhaust air, so the gap cannot be made so small that the head pressure on the roof creates too much strain or stress on the roof assembly. A typical gap range may be about 1.5 inches to about 2 inches. The actual gap used will be determined by the booth size, the exhaust air flow characteristics, required cleaning time, the effectiveness of the pressure wave created periodically by the nozzles 50 and the desired rate of descent.

The use of the exhaust air to perform a significant portion of the cleaning operation has a significant cost benefit as it allows the amount of required pressurized air to be reduced. In one embodiment, the shear forces applied by the exhaust air passing through the gap between the roof and the doors provides about half of the energy needed to clean the booth 12 interior surfaces. This represents a substantial savings of pressurized air that would otherwise have to be used (or other cleaning techniques such as wiping actions).

The brief but high velocity pressure wave that is periodically applied via the nozzles 50 not only dislodges the powder particles from the surfaces being cleaned, but also imparts sufficient energy to the dislodged particles that they impact other particles to dislodge them. In the exemplary embodiment herein, the pressure waves have about a two foot effective zone so that the nozzles 50 may be intermittently triggered and need not produce a constant flow of pressurized air. The pressure waves do not cause static charging or impact fusion.

The powder entrained exhaust air is drawn into the recovery system 14, such as the cyclone intake duct 70, for example, via the intake slot 62 which extends vertically from the floor to the top of the booth. Since in this example the cyclone intake duct 70 is positioned about halfway between the floor 38 and the top of the booth, the intake slot 62 may vary in width along its length, being narrower near the cyclone intake duct 70 and wider at the top and bottom (see FIGS. 4A, 4B and 4C). This achieves a fairly uniform flow of air into the intake slot 62 along the entire height of the booth. For example, the intake slot 62 may be about two inches at the intake duct and taper in width to about four inches near the top and bottom of the intake panel 44.

During a cleaning operation, which may be part of a color change operation for example, the doors are fully closed, the guns are retracted from the booth (powder is removed from the gun exterior surfaces by air nozzles positioned at the gun slots) and the gun slot cover mechanism 60 is used to close the gun slots (as will be described hereinafter.) The conveyor slot cover 52 is also closed after all conveyor hooks have cleared the slot. The roof 40 is then lowered and powder is removed and directed downward off the surfaces of the doors and is drawn sideways into the intake slot 62 and the cyclone 15. Prior to lowering the roof, the nozzles 50 may be triggered.

As the roof 40 is lowered, the effective size of the booth changes. This changes the dynamics of the air flow into the cyclone 15. In order to efficiently continue to draw powder out of the booth interior, the operation is changed from a sideways recovery mode via the intake slot 62 to a downward or down draft recovery mode via the floor duct 78 (see FIGS. 4A and 4B). This changeover is accomplished by providing a recovery duct bulkhead 82 that travels within the plenum 74. The bulkhead 82 travels at about the same rate as the roof 40 while the roof is being lowered. The bulkhead 82 in one embodiment is a closed box-like structure or frame that generally conforms to the interior shape of the recovery duct plenum 74. Any suitable means may be used to move the bulkhead such as cables for example. As the bulkhead 82 reaches the intake inlet duct 70 of the cyclone 15, it blocks the inlet to the cyclone 15. Mechanical stops 84 may be provided inside the plenum 74 to limit further lowering of the bulkhead 82 within the plenum 74. When the inlet 70 to the cyclone is thus blocked, the floor bypass duct 78 is opened by sliding the cover 80. This allows powder that is directed down towards the floor 38 to be exhausted from the booth through the floor, into the bypass duct 75 and into the bypass inlet duct 76 of the cyclone (sometimes referred to as a banjo) to the after filter and blower system 16. After the roof has been lowered to or near the floor, it is then raised back up to the top of the booth and the bulkhead 82 also returns to the top of the plenum 74.

In an alternative embodiment illustrated in FIGS. 4A and 4B, in place of the floor opening 78, or in combination therewith, a slot 79 may be provided between the bottom of the primary duct 72 and the floor 38. This slot 79 communicates with the recovery duct plenum 74 so that downward moving exhaust air and powder enters the plenum 74 via the slot 79. Since the slot 79 will always be open, the exhaust air with powder may also be selectively recovered through the bypass duct 75 into the bypass inlet 76 of the cyclone 15. For example, when the roof 40 and bulkhead 82 are still in the upper portion of the booth 12, the slot 79 will communicate with the cyclone inlet 70 via the recovery duct 74. However, when the inlet 70 is blocked, the bypass duct door 81 may be opened so that the powder entrained exhaust air flows into the bypass duct 75, into the bypass outlet 15b and on to the after filter system 16. The door 81 may be realized in any convenient manner such as a simple plate valve the closes and opens the bypass outlet. A pneumatic cylinder or other motive means, including manual operation, may be used to open and close the cyclone bypass.

The roof 40 may carry with it one or more accumulators 86 that contain pressurized air and provide the energy and air needed for the air nozzles 50 that are mounted on the roof as well as the conveyor slot air plenums 54, 56. Separate accumulators may also be used to provide the pressurized air for the air jets mounted on the bottom edges of the doors as well as the blow off nozzles for the spray guns 18. In this manner all energy needed to clean the booth interior surfaces is provided from accumulators so that shop air need not always be applied to the cleaning apparatuses. The accumulators can be

11

replenished during a coating or cleaning operation. This allows the cleaning energy to be maintained at a constant pressure as it is being discharged through the various cleaning nozzles including but not limited to the nozzles **50** on the roof **40**. The various cleaning nozzles for the guns, the floor and the roof nozzles may be intermittently triggered at appropriate intervals such as every second and a half for example as described above.

FIG. **5** illustrates schematically the door positions for cleaning and spraying operations (the doors in the closed position for cleaning are shown in solid line). During cleaning the doors are fully closed. During spraying, the doors may be opened to any convenient dimension to maintain adequate flow of containment air to contain the powder overspray. In one embodiment the doors are opened to an eighteen inch gap. The doors may be opened and closed with any suitable actuator mechanism. In the embodiment of FIG. **2**, pneumatic cylinders **90** and **92** are used to open and close the left side doors and pneumatic cylinder driven arms **94**, **96** are used to open and close the right side doors. Proximity sensors (not shown) or other suitable position monitors may be used to control positioning of the doors. For larger booths in which the doors include two or more sections, each section may have its own pneumatic drive member as illustrated in FIG. **2A**. A door for example having an upper section **32a** and a lower section **32b** will have two actuators **90a** and **90b** that can be operated together to move the two sections as a single door unit. Similarly, the front right side doors **30a** and **30b** may be moved by actuators **96a** and **96b**.

FIG. **6** illustrates an example of a lift off hinge **46** that may be used to mount the doors but other hinge designs may be used as required. In this example, the hinge **46** is realized in the form of a structural steel lift off hinge that includes a pivot pin **100**. One plate **102** of the hinge is mounted to a door while the other hinge plate **104** is mounted on a suitable support structure. A piece of polypropylene **106** or other suitable material may also be installed on the inside surface of the hinge joint **46** that faces the booth interior to function as a live gap seal and prevent powder from escaping the booth.

FIGS. **7**, **8** and **9** illustrate an embodiment of the gun slot cover mechanism **60**. The gun slot cover mechanism **60** is used to open and close the gun slots **61**. When the gun slots are open, the spray guns can be moved into and out of the spray booth. When the guns have been retracted for a cleaning and/or color change operation, the gun slot cover **60** is positioned so as to prevent powder from escaping through the gun slots. Due to the vertical length of the gun slots, a plurality of covers may be used as required.

The gun slot cover mechanism **60** includes a flexible cover member **112** that is mounted on a frame **114** using a ball and track arrangement **116**. A central portion **118** of the cover member is attached to one end of a piston **120** that may be translated, for example, by a pneumatic cylinder **122**. A plate **124** supports two ball arms **126** which carry a guide ball **128** thereon. The guide ball **128** slides within a channel **130** attached to the cover member **112**. In order to open the gun slots, the piston **120** is pushed outward so as to displace the central portion **118** into the booth interior. The cover member **112** includes two side portions **132** that bend inward as the balls **128** slide along the positionally fixed channels **130**. This position is shown in phantom in FIG. **7**. When the piston is retracted, the cover member **112** returns to the position illustrated in FIG. **7**, which closes the gun slots and forms a smooth sealed gun slot panel **42**. Due to their length, as shown in FIG. **8**, more than one drive mechanism may be used for each cover.

12

With reference to FIG. **10**, because the spray guns are positioned on only one side of the spray booth, it may be necessary to double spray the parts. FIG. **10** illustrates an exemplary layout for a material application system that uses two spray booths **200** and **202**. The conveyor **26** transports parts through both booths. Note that in this example there are two after filter/blower systems **16**, one for each cyclone system **15**. As an alternative embodiment, a motor or other suitable drive mechanism may be provided with the conveyor system so as to rotate the parts during a coating operation. This would allow parts to be fully coated within a single booth. Parts may also be manually repositioned for complete coating.

With reference to FIGS. **1**, **11A** and **11B**, the spray guns **18** typically include one or more hoses and cables **305**, including, for example, material feed hoses, air hoses and in the case of electrostatic guns, electrical cables. The material feed hose extends from the gun all the way to the feed center **21**. The electrical cables may have to run a substantial distance to an electrical control console (not shown) and the air hoses will typically run a length to a supply manifold or other compressed air source. Particularly in the case of powder feed hoses, for the guns located above normal human height, the hose runs can be quite lengthy. This is especially the case for guns near the top of a twenty-seven foot booth. These hose lengths can be quite heavy and represent a significant load for the gun movers and oscillators.

In accordance with an aspect of the invention, a strain relief arrangement may be provided. This concept contemplates a mechanism that limits the load carried by the gun mover and oscillator while at the same time allowing full range of gun movement during a powder coating operation.

Positioned behind the guns **18** are one or more hose cabinets **300** that extend vertically about to the top of the spray booth **12**. Mounted on the cabinets **300** are a plurality of strain relief devices **302**. In the exemplary embodiment, there is a single strain relief device **302** for each spray gun, however, one alternative would be to make the strain relief devices of an appropriate size that each could accommodate more than one gun.

Each strain relief device **302** includes a support cylinder **304** and a hose clamp bar **306**. A hose and, when used, electrical cables and air hose extend from the associated spray gun, are provided a predetermined slack length between the gun **18** and the cylinder **304** so that the gun mover and oscillator can freely move the guns as desired. The hoses/cables are positioned over the top of the cylinder **304** and then the clamp bar **306** is secured by any convenient means such as bolts **308**. The clamping action isolates the hoses and cable weight from the gun and gun mover except for the portion that extends from the gun **18** to the clamp bar **306**. In this manner, a fixed predetermined load can be maintained on the gun mover independent of the overall length of the hoses and cables. This also reduces force applied to the back end of the gun and stress on the hoses and cables.

The hoses and cables run from the relief device **302** into the hose cabinet **300** and down to the floor area for further routing as needed. The cylinder **302** should be of sufficient diameter to prevent the hoses from collapsing under their own weight. Note that multiple cabinets may be used as needed depending on the number and size of hoses and cables being routed.

FIG. **12** is a simplified schematic of another feature of the invention. We have found that in some cases, eddy currents and other flow effects can cause entrapment areas or pockets within the recovery duct interior plenum **74**. In an alternative embodiment, the interior plenum **350**, which it will be recalled is the duct through which powder entrained exhaust

13

air enters the cyclone **15** via the recovery slot **62** and cyclone inlet **70**, is provided with an offset or shifted slot opening **352**, meaning that the slot is not centered on the central axis X of the plenum **350**. In addition, the slot **352** opens to a tangential or tapered surface **354** that joins to the main plenum cylinder **356**. This geometry produces a swirling, somewhat cyclonic action within the plenum **350** to reduce eddy currents and entrapment areas or “dead spots.”

Even with the embodiment of FIG. **12**, or with other configurations, there may be surfaces **360** that are not fully cleaned by air flow within the duct work. FIG. **13** illustrates one solution to this possible anomaly. An air blow off manifold **370** is mounted at one end to the ceiling or roof **40** so that it travels with the roof during a cleaning operation. The blow off manifold **370** may be realized, for example, in the form of a hollow composite extrusion **372** and may be provided with one or more air jets, slots or ports **374** that direct pressurized air **376** at the surfaces **360** of concern.

Pressurized air may be supplied to the blow off manifold **370** from one of the accumulators **86** that are carried by the roof **40**, or any other suitable source. A pressure regulator **378** and solenoid valve **380** may be used to control flow of air to the manifold **370**. The blow off manifold may be on continuously as the roof **40** travels down and up the booth **12** during a cleaning operation, or may be pulsed.

FIGS. **14A** and **14B** illustrate some additional features that may be used with the roof **40** structure. In some cases when the roof **40** is fully raised, such as during a spraying operation, it may be desired to pulse the nozzles **50** before the conveyor slot cover **52** is closed. In order to maintain stability of the roof **40** that is primarily supported on the cables **400**, stabilizers **402** are provided that extend generally vertically from the roof frame **404**. These stabilizers **402** may be in the form of stanchions, bars or other suitably strong and rigid members that are slideably received in a stabilizer channel **406** when the roof **40** is raised. The stabilizer channels **406** are rigidly mounted to the overall framework **22** and thus hold the roof **40** stable even against the impulse forces of the nozzles **50**.

The roof **40** structure also carries rollers **410**. These rollers **410** bridge the narrow gap between the roof **40** and the interior surfaces of the booth doors as the roof **40** is raised and lowered, thereby stabilizing the roof **40**, keeping it centered and preventing extreme movement during nozzle **50** pulses. The closed cover **52** (FIG. **3**) also helps stabilize the roof **40** during

14

cleaning operation. The rollers **410** may be provided with brushes (not shown) to prevent powder from adhering to the rollers. Since the rollers **410** are positioned above the nozzles **50**, the surfaces they contact are clean so that powder is not pressed against the wall surfaces.

It is intended that invention not be limited to the particular embodiment disclosed as the best mode contemplated for carrying out this invention, but that the invention will include all embodiments falling within the scope of the appended claims.

The invention claimed is:

1. A method for extracting powder overspray from a powder spray booth during a cleaning operation, the method comprising:

lowering a roof from the top of the booth towards the booth floor;

applying pressurized air to remove powder off of interior surfaces of the booth as the roof is lowered;

extracting powder sideways from the booth to a cyclone inlet, said step of extracting powder sideways being relative to the vertical axis of the booth during a first portion of movement of the roof, wherein the powder is extracted through a vertical intake slot into a recovery duct that is in communication with the cyclone inlet; and extracting powder downward through the booth floor during a second portion of movement of the roof after blocking the cyclone inlet when the roof reaches a predetermined vertical position within the booth, wherein the cyclone inlet is blocked in the recovery duct by lowering a structure that blocks the cyclone inlet when the roof reaches the predetermined vertical position within the booth.

2. The method of claim **1** wherein the step of extracting powder downward through the booth floor during said second portion of movement of the roof comprises extracting powder into a bypass duct to bypass the cyclone inlet during said second portion.

3. The method of claim **1**, wherein, during the step of lowering the roof, the step of lowering the structure that blocks the cyclone inlet is performed at the same speed.

4. The method of claim **1**, wherein said structure comprises a bulkhead, box or frame.

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